

JUL 7 1975

Schelling

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PUBLIC POLICY PROGRAM

LITTAUER CENTER

July 2, 1975

Dr. Joshua Lederberg
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Stanford University
Stanford, CA 94305

Dear Dr. Lederberg:

I am bound to disappoint you, and therefore somewhat relieved not to have reached you by telephone because you would have expected that I indeed had some timely help to give, and I probably don't.

Except for a few pictures of the two young women who were returned, and who were reported as declining to comment in order not to jeopardize negotiations, I've seen almost nothing about the event since three or four days after the abduction took place. I'm not even sure whether they retain one or two of their captives, and I have no idea who they are, how they're organized, what they are demanding, how they identify themselves, or even more than the barest circumstances of the capture.

An interesting case was described to me once by Roberta Wohlstetter. When Castro was still leading a band of about 150 men in the Sierra Maestre, he wanted publicity. He kidnapped a couple of American newspaper reporters. He made them see with their eyes what he wanted to show them, took good care of them, and told them to go home and write about what they had seen.

My casual observation is that the live-return rate of victims who were kidnapped solely for ransom is not very good; still, there remains your interesting question of why anybody bothers to return the victim or even to bother to keep the victim alive for any period of time. An important question may be how amateur or professional the kidnappers are. Amateurs may be afraid to kill; they may intend to kill but be unable to bring themselves to do it; they may be more fearful of consequences if they add killing to kidnapping, and that in turn may make them afraid, if there are several involved, or even two kidnappers, of each other in the event that some one of them has to do the killing and others may trade information for leniency if they are caught.

An important possibility, suggested by some prison riots, is that the capture was opportunistic rather than premeditated.

Dr. Joshua Lederberg
Page 2
July 2, 1975

Does the event with the Stanford students look as though it was planned and organized, or does it look as though the body of kidnapers just stumbled on the students and got a bright idea?

Quite a number of the airplane hijackings and some other hostage-takings of recent years appeared to have been at the hands of people who wanted favorable publicity. I can see that a right wing group might claim it was a left wing group and then kill its victims to discredit a left wing group; but if we know the politics of the group, and if the group deliberately identifies itself with a cause or a political movement or with some political leader or with an ethnic minority or something of the sort, and if there is any reason to believe that the group wants sympathy rather than widespread fear, I should think we could expect the group to want successful negotiations leading not only to the return of the hostages but even some kind words from the hostages at the end of the ordeal. Confirmed terrorists no--they prefer a reputation for wanton killing as well as for killing of hostages. But a group that is known to be seeking wider political support probably wouldn't want to identify itself as the kidnapping outfit unless it expected favorable publicity in the end. I don't know whether this particular group appears to be of that kind, but to the extent that they want sympathy for their movement, one might expect them to take decent care of their hostages. Of course, one might also expect them not to want early termination of negotiations.

Prison rioters and prison escapees typically use hostages for immunity. That is, they hold them for easy retaliation in case they themselves are attacked. Is there any possibility that the group in Kenya was in trouble and wanted a chance to rest somewhere with security? That might lead one to expect they would keep their hostages alive, find a way to demonstrate it, but perhaps hold them a good long time.

One thing I didn't know was whether or not the group that did this has taken hostages before, and whether similar groups have taken hostages. It occurred to me that native African hostages might not make the American newspapers, and that what was novel was not the kidnapping but the fact that these were Western students. There would then be at least some local history of kidnappings to offer a benchmark.

As you can see, this is all just woolgathering on my part, since I don't even know enough of the details to know which words to use, "kidnapping" or "capturing" or "holding hostage,"

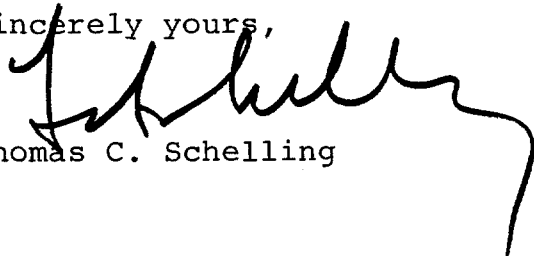
Dr. Joshua Lederberg
Page 3
July 2, 1975

and I don't know whether the analogy is Quebec separatists, Argentine leftists, Italian rightists, the Symbionese Liberation Army, escaped convicts, rioting convicts, Navy mutineers on an aircraft carrier, or characters out of The Godfather.

I am pretty sure there are no good publicly available studies in this country of the class of activities of which kidnapping and hostage-taking are examples. Two years ago a group of my graduate students looked into what was known about aircraft hijacking, and there was very little even on that, and less that related to the wider class of activities. I have seen an occasional good study of prison riots, with some attention to the negotiating style of prisoners who had taken hostages, but the author's interest was not in the kinds of questions you were raising, and I did not get a lot of help. And it is not the kind of subject on which it is likely that much imaginative or systematic work has been officially done. I mean not in this country.

My letter, as you can see, is just a roundabout way of agreeing that the questions are interesting and important but showing that I know far too little to be of any timely help.

Sincerely yours,


Thomas C. Schelling

TCS:jh
Enclosure